

This is a transcription of episode 6 of Season Two of In the Dark. Italics indicate audio. Musical notations and other production elements aren't included. Because there may be imprecisions in the transcript, the audio should be considered the official record of the episode.

Episode 6: Punishment

Previously on In the Dark.

VIDEO: Odell Hallmon: He told me! I know he did it!

John Johnson: You're saying he told you he did but he did it in an indirect way.

Odell Hallmon: Right.

Joann Young: Odell got away with everything. He got privilege, a lot of privilege.

Brad Craver: He worked something out with someone, either the DA or some other agency, because he didn't stay in jail long.

Craig Hill: Like he sent me a friend request and everything. And I'm like, 'Who?'

Madeleine Baran: After he killed your mom and your sister?

Craig Hill: Mm hmm. This was probably like, maybe a month or two after. He was like, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah, can you send me some money?' Like asking people for money. He's been asking a lot of people for money in this area.

One morning last fall, our producer Samara got a Facebook alert on her phone. Odell "Cookie" Hallmon had gotten in touch.

Samara found our producer Natalie. They turned on a recorder.

Samara Freemark: OK, so here's what happened. OK, so I had sent a friend request to Odell's Facebook page. And that was a couple weeks ago. And now he just typed—like as we are speaking, he typed, 'I hope you not setting me up. What we got to talk about?'

Samara Freemark: OK, so I'm going to write, 'Hi Odell. I'm not setting you up. I'm a reporter. We just want to talk to you.'

This is Season Two of In the Dark, an investigative podcast by APM Reports. I'm Madeleine Baran. This season is about the case of Curtis Flowers, a black man from a small town in Mississippi who's spent the past 21 years fighting for his life — and a white prosecutor who's spent that same time trying just as hard to execute him.

It had been a year and a half since Odell Hallmon had killed his ex-girlfriend Marquita Hill and her mother Carolyn and another man and tried to kill his own son. Odell Hallmon was now

serving three life sentences in Parchman prison. For the first time in Odell's life, there were no deals left to be made that would get him out of prison, no freedom any prosecutor could offer him to keep him on their side.

And yet, Odell Hallmon remains the greatest obstacle to Curtis Flowers getting out of prison because Odell's testimony — his story of Curtis Flowers confessing to him — right now is the only piece of direct evidence that the D.A. Doug Evans has. Everything else is circumstantial.

And Odell Hallmon has never wavered from that story. He's never even come close. He's Doug Evans' star witness — reliable, compelling, willing to testify as often as he's needed. And not someone who talks to reporters.

And yet, here he was, messaging Samara on Facebook.

Because it turns out, Odell Hallmon, this triple murderer who is in prison, supposedly under strict supervision — this guy has a cell phone.

"How much my info worth?" he messaged to Samara.

"Can't pay you anything," Samara told him.

And with that Odell fell silent.

We waited four days, and then we texted Odell to see if he'd talk. But all he would text back was, quote, "I respect your job and I understand what you trying to get, but I don't open up for free, sorry."

Again, Odell went dark.

But then after a few days, he was back. Odell messaged Samara on Facebook. This time, he'd prepared an offer. He said he would answer a total of five questions per day — no more than that.

But it was going to cost us. It was going to cost \$500. Odell explained that if we put \$500 on his canteen account at the prison then, quote, "I will answer all your questions as truthfully as possible. Then I need you to write a book on me."

Samara told him no. None of that was going to happen.

Again, Odell went dark.

And this is how it went. Odell wanting us to pay him, us telling him absolutely not, until finally Odell realized he wasn't going to get any money out of us.

And then one day, Odell sent Samara a message, saying he might be willing to talk.

(ringing)

Odell Hallmon: What's up?

Samara Freemark: Are you there?

Odell Hallmon: Yeah. I'm behind my tent.

Samara Freemark: Behind your tent?

Odell Hallmon: Yeah, I'm behind my tent. I got a little tent up I gotta be behind when I'm on the phone.

Odell told Samara he was talking to her from inside a tent he'd made on his bunk. It was like a blanket fort. He told her he'd put it up, so he could have some privacy when he made calls from his contraband cell phone in Parchman prison. Not surprisingly, the audio quality of the call wasn't great.

Odell Hallmon: Hold on for a minute.

Samara Freemark: Yeah, yeah.

Odell Hallmon: Hey! Fosnack! Be quiet, I'm having some business, man. Man. I'm back.

We had finally gotten in touch with Odell Hallmon, the man whose testimony right now is the only piece of direct evidence in the case against Curtis Flowers.

We had so many questions for him.

But Odell wanted to talk about Odell. He seemed into the idea of having someone to talk to. According to Odell, prison really wasn't all that bad. He'd been reading a lot, mostly fantasy novels.

Odell Hallmon: Like this one I'm reading right now. It's a novel of dragons. you know what I'm saying?

Samara Freemark: Uh-huh.

Odell Hallmon: It's a novel of dragons in the old world, when dragons used to come and burn up peoples and fight with peoples and shit like that, you had three or four different kind of dragons and shit.

And Odell said a lot of things in his life hadn't changed as much as you might expect. He said his cell was full of contraband, all kinds of stuff.

Odell Hallmon: It just full of shit, contraband that you don't supposed to have. Just name it. It's in here.

Samara Freemark: Uh, like what?

Odell Hallmon: Drugs, drugs. Can't get in no more trouble. (laughs) Can't get in no more trouble.

Odell was running a little business out of his cell. He even made a transaction while he was talking with Samara.

Odell Hallmon: Delro, Delro here go your money. Here go your money right here. You hear me? I said here go your money! (The following is said to Samara) I be having so much stuff going on at a time. I be making a lot of money.

But eventually, Odell got around to talking about the Curtis Flowers case.

In court, Odell had always testified that he didn't get anything in exchange for helping the prosecution. That was one of the things that made him so credible to the jurors — that Odell had come forward on his own to tell the truth about a horrific crime because his conscience was bothering him.

But on the phone from Parchman, Odell told a different story of how in 2001 he came to switch sides and went from being a witness for the defense — saying his sister was lying — to being a witness for the D.A. Doug Evans.

Odell Hallmon: Man, I had got caught up on some old drug charge, couple drug charges.

Samara Freemark: Mmhmm.

Odell Hallmon: He had charges on my head. And that's how it all got started.

Odell was talking to Samara about how in 2001, he had these two drug charges hanging over his head. These are the two drug charges I talked about in the previous episode — the ones for getting caught with crack.

And Odell told Samara that D.A. Doug Evans called him in the jail and started talking to him about the Curtis Flowers case.

Odell Hallmon: Doug Evans found out that I had got caught up on a charge. So he called the jail and asked to speak to me. And he said, 'Odell, I know you lied on the stand. Do you want to—. Are you trying to make it right?'

Odell said that Evans told him, look, I know you were lying when you testified for the defense. And I'm giving you the chance to make it right.

And Odell said he saw an opportunity.

Odell Hallmon: You get caught up in a situation. You know, you could beat it in court, but why go to court, spending all kind of money on lawyers and shit when you got knowledge in your head the D.A. want.

Odell said — when he'd gotten caught up in a situation, he could've spent a lot of money on a lawyer, but why do that when you have knowledge in your head that the D.A. wants.

Odell Hallmon: So therefore, when an opportunity came to me, I just took it.

And so Odell said when an opportunity came to him, he took it.

And he sat down with Doug Evans' investigator John Johnson and switched sides. He made those two videos that turned him into a state's witness.

And he wrote Doug Evans that letter, saying that Curtis Flowers had confessed to the murders at Tardy Furniture.

And it worked. Just like I'd discovered in Odell's criminal records, those two drug charges, Odell said, they did go away.

Odell Hallmon: Charges never got to the grand jury. I ain't take no plea. They just, you know what I'm saying?

Samara Freemark: They just made it go away.

Odell Hallmon: Yeah. I helped them. They helped me. That what's it's all boiled down to.

Odell told Samara, "I helped them. They helped me. That's what it all boiled down to."

It was a deal, plain and simple.

And it wasn't just one deal, according to Odell. Odell said these deals went on for years as he continued to testify in the Flowers trials.

Odell Hallmon: You know, I was a criminal. I'm a criminal. I was doing stuff out there in the streets, selling drugs, and lot of times, the police stopped me, they'll search.

But Odell said he got away with a lot of this — because of the D.A. Doug Evans.

Odell Hallmon: Doug will tell 'em he ain't gonna prosecute it, you know what I'm saying? Shit like that. Doug Evans is OK, man. I really can't say nothing bad about Doug. Man, we had a good relationship. Hold on, hold on, hold on, lemme get this. Hold on. Peacock! Calm down man, I'm talking on the phone. Peacock! Peacock!

Odell told Samara all this very matter of factly — look, I'm a criminal, and I'm a drug dealer, and I had something valuable that Doug Evans wanted, and so, obviously I'm not going to be doing a whole lot of prison time when I get caught with drugs.

Odell Hallmon: I was a local drug dealer. I used to get jammed up like every month. Them mother fuckers used to jam me up in all kind of shit. So, they locked me up. I get locked up. I call Doug Evans. 'Doug, they locked me up for some bullshit.' 'What they got you for?' 'Drugs, sales of drugs.' Doug Evans say he would rather have a murderer in

prison than a drug dealer. He'd rather see a murderer in prison than a drug dealer, right? This is what Doug said. I used them son of a bitches just like they used me. Shit.

But Odell said he was a little surprised when he didn't get punished for trying to run over the sheriff's deputy, Brad Carver, with his car back in 2014.

Odell Hallmon: They tried to hem me up and I had drugs on me. And I ran over a police car getting on down. I was supposed to have been locked up. He shoulda thrown me away a long time ago instead of using me to keep Curtis locked up.

But what about the story Odell Hallmon testified to in court — the one about Curtis Flowers confessing to the murders at Tardy Furniture — the story that Odell said he'd used to get all of these deals — the one that Odell Hallmon had testified to under oath in four trials.

By this point, I had already looked at every other major piece of evidence in the case against Curtis Flowers — the route, the gun, the other two snitches. None of it had held up to scrutiny. And now all that was left was this one story — this one confession.

And then from his cell in Parchman prison, on a spotty cell phone connection, from underneath his tent, Odell Hallmon told Samara that story was a lie.

Odell Hallmon: As far as him telling me he killed some people, hell, naw, he ain't ever told me that. That was a lie. I don't know nothing about this shit. It was all make believe. Everything was all make believe on my part.

And with that, the D.A. Doug Evans' star witness had reversed himself on a contraband cell phone from inside Parchman prison.

Odell Hallmon: All this shit was just a fantasy. All of it was just a fantasy, that's all. A bunch of fantasies. A bunch of lies.

Odell didn't express any remorse about having lied under oath. It wasn't like his conscience was eating him up. This triple-murderer wasn't too concerned that he had lied in a trial that could send a man to his death. He offered no apology, nothing. He really didn't care.

The story was a lie. Doug Evans' star witness had recanted — and that could matter a great deal to Curtis' case, but just how much, I have no way of knowing because the case is under appeal right now.

And because it's under appeal, because of the timing, it's quite possible that what we've found out could end up being used by Curtis Flowers' attorneys. And that includes not just what Odell Hallmon told us, but what all the other witnesses we talked to told us, too.

The witnesses who told us different stories from the ones they'd testified to at trial. The witnesses who told us they didn't actually remember seeing Curtis Flowers on the day of the murders. The witnesses who told us that they felt intimidated by law enforcement.

The reason all of this could be particularly important right now is because of where the appeal of Curtis Flowers stands.

After the sixth trial in 2010 — that's the latest one — Curtis appealed his conviction and death sentence, like he always does. Only this time, something different happened. Curtis did not win his appeal. The Mississippi Supreme Court did not overturn his conviction.

So, what's happening now is that Curtis has a separate team of lawyers who are working on a type of appeal called a post-conviction. It's different from a regular appeal, because in a post-conviction, what matters the most is new evidence, new information, things that were not known at the time of the trial, evidence that if it had been known and presented to the jurors, might have led the jurors to reach a different conclusion, might have led them to find Curtis Flowers not guilty.

Odell Hallmon and Curtis Flowers are now both in Parchman prison.

Odell, in a cell that is, by his own account, full of drugs, talking on a contraband cell phone, setting up a fort, running a business, getting written up for all kinds of infractions.

Curtis Flowers is now 48. He lives in an 8 by 12 cell on a unit reserved mostly for inmates on death row. Curtis is in the cell alone. There's just a bed, and a toilet, and a sink. And this unit is loud. People are yelling all the time and the sound echoes off the concrete walls. Most days, Curtis is only allowed to leave his cell for an hour to exercise in a metal cage outside. The rest of the time, 23 hours a day, he's in his cell by himself.

I haven't been able to talk to Curtis about what this is like. The prison won't let me visit him or talk to him on the phone and his lawyers told him not to write back to me, but his parents and friends have told me that Curtis spends his time writing letters to his family, praying and reading.

One of his friends told me that one of the books that Curtis has read is a novel called *A Lesson Before Dying*. The book is based on the real story of a black teenager from Louisiana who was executed in 1947 after an all-white jury found him guilty of killing a white store owner.

The cells at Parchman prison don't have air conditioning, and in the summer, it can easily reach more than a hundred degrees. Curtis' mother Lola told me that it's hard for Curtis to get much sleep in his cell. So, he'll just sit on his bunk and sweat.

Lola Flowers: And it be so hot, they just be sweating, just ringin' wet with sweat. Mmm hmm. And Curtis said there be so many mosquitoes come in their cell at night — and rats. He said the man next door caught five rats on one of those strips of, that rat trap

that you— the sticky stuff. Mm hmm. I don't know, you know, you just hate to see him in there locked away and everybody else out enjoying themselves and everything. It's hard sometimes just looking at him, sitting up in there.

His mother Lola told me that since going into prison, Curtis has gained weight and developed diabetes. And that lately, Curtis has stopped leaving his cell to exercise because it gets too hot in the cage under the open sun.

Curtis Flowers been locked up since 1997. In a few years, the scales will tip, and Curtis will be able to say that he's spent more than half his life in prison.

We'll be right back after the break.

(BREAK)

(sound of a party in the distance, music playing)

One weekend last summer, back when I was just getting started on my reporting, Curtis' sister Priscilla invited me and our producer Natalie to a birthday party at her house. It was for her daughter, Curtis' niece.

(music gets louder)

Priscilla Ward: Hey how y'all doing?

There was a tent set up in the backyard and Priscilla's husband was taking turns grilling fish and serving as a DJ.

Natalie Jablonski: This is a party.

Priscilla Ward: This is a party. This is my sister-in-law.

Madeleine Baran: Hi, nice to meet you.

Priscilla Ward: Y'all want something to eat, get something to eat, I'm covering it back up.

A lot of members of the Flowers family were there — Curtis' mother Lola and his father Archie, other relatives, friends. Everyone was dancing together on the porch.

After a few minutes, I looked over and realized that Lola Flowers, Curtis's mother, wasn't there anymore. I leaned over to ask her husband Archie where she went. He pointed to the inside of the house. "She's in there talking on the phone to Curtis," he said.

We stayed at the party for at least another hour, but Curtis' mother never came back outside.

Having a family member in prison is a very particular kind of loss. In some ways, Curtis is gone, but in others, he is still right here, on the phone talking about how his day went. Sometimes the fact that Curtis is just a phone call away means that Lola feels pulled back and forth between

these two worlds — Curtis' world, solitary confinement in Parchman prison — and the world of Winona, where the rest of her family is. Like this night, in her daughter's backyard at the birthday party.

Even after 21 years, it's still just as hard for Curtis' family and friends to accept that Curtis — their son, their brother, their cousin, their friend — had been taken from them.

They feel Curtis' absence all the time — not just at a birthday party or on Christmas, but every single day.

When Curtis went into jail, he was just 26 years old. And that 26-year-old Curtis is still how a lot of people in Winona think of him. It's like Curtis has been frozen in 1997. These memories of Curtis from back before he was arrested, I've heard them from so many people over the past year.

I've learned that Curtis liked to play basketball with his cousin Kittery. Kittery said Curtis would try to act like he was Larry Byrd, like he was some kind of three-point expert.

Kittery Jones: And so, he would stop at half court, and jack up a three. He may make one out of twenty, but he would try it, though. I'm just telling you just how, how he was. (laughs) So he would do funny stuff like that and get sit down on the bench. And he would sit over there and be laughing.

Madeleine Baran: Would you ever tease him about it?

Kittery Jones: Mess with him all the time about that. Tell him, 'Man, you need to stop all that, man.' (everyone laughs)

I've learned that Curtis liked to go fishing and hang out with his family. He liked all kinds of music — old fashioned gospel, hip hop. One of Curtis' friends told me he remembered that Curtis liked that song "Crossroads," by Bone Thugs-n- Harmony.

("Crossroads" starts playing)

For Curtis' uncle, Roscoe Campbell, looking back on his memories of Curtis now after so many years, it seems almost like a dream, these simple moments they shared, summer days spent driving around, listening to music. Just him and Curtis, the two of them together. He can still picture it.

Roscoe Campbell: See we get on them dirt roads, see. We get on them old country roads. We get us a six pack or, at least a half case of beer. We get on that dirt road, we just ride and drink a few beers and enjoy. That's the way we do. So, we hit the back-country roads and go all the way to Carrollton. Go all the way to Vaiden. Drive, drink, talk, sing, and have fun. (laughter) That's all we did.

Roscoe Campbell: You know, me and him hung together. We went everywhere to together. We sung together. We did all that together. We played together. So that was it, you know. You know, we were just a close family. We were just close.

("Crossroads" fades out)

And then one day, Curtis was gone. Curtis' world — all of his friends and family and birthdays and fishing and family reunions — that world was still there, but Curtis was no longer in it.

Roscoe still talks to Curtis on the phone, but it's been about a year since he's visited Curtis in prison. Roscoe told me that even though he knows he should visit Curtis, and even though he wants to see him, that sometimes, it's just too hard.

Roscoe Campbell: You know, I don't like it. I can't stand to go down there because it hurts me so bad. When I go down there I just don't feel right. For something I know my nephew didn't do. It hurt just to talk about it. It hurts. It's like taking a piece out your heart and laying it on the ground and stomping it. That's how bad it makes you feel. And then they talk about death row, and all this. And Lord knows, if something happens to him something will probably happen to me. My heart ain't going to be able to take it. All them years. When you got somebody locked down that long for nothing, that hurts.

Over the past year, I've spent a fair amount of time with Curtis' parents. I got to know Curtis' father, Archie Flowers. He's 76 and retired. And Mr. Flowers is not a talkative man. The first time I met him when I came to interview him and his wife, he barely spoke. And over time, I learned why.

Talking about Curtis is hard for everyone in the Flowers family, but for Curtis' father Archie, it seemed especially hard. Whenever he would start to talk about Curtis, he would catch himself, sigh, and stop, so he wouldn't start crying.

Archie Flowers: Be talking and be feeling bad, you know, talking about it, you know. It ain't too many times when my mind is off of him. I think about him all the time. Heavy.

But after I got to know Curtis' father over many months, he started to tell me about his son.

He told me that Curtis started singing gospel when he was really little because Archie Flowers sang in a gospel group and he would take his son Curtis with him to practices.

Archie Flowers: You know, he just loved to sing, sing, sing, sing. And I said, 'Well, next time we go somewhere, you gonna get up and sing.'

Curtis started performing with his father's group, and it turned out Curtis could sing.

Archie Flowers: Oooh, I said, boy, You better than I am.' (laughs) Oooh, he'd be

sounding so good. I said, 'Boy, you ain't finna waste that voice. You gonna do something.' Shooo. I figure when God give you something and it's good, you better try to hang with it, you know?

Archie Flowers still sings with his son when he goes to visit him every two weeks at Parchman prison. In those visits, Archie and his son are separated by a Plexiglass barrier. So, they can see each other, but they have to use a phone to talk or to sing.

Archie Flowers: But I'm all right when I see him 'cause he so happy. You know he be glad and smiling and then he get to thinking up some songs. 'Daddy, we ought to try this. We ought to try.' Yeah, we got a song we, that he loved to sing, when we get together. (singing next part) 'Just say you love Jesus. Say you love Jesus.' It's really pretty. 'If you love Jesus, you ought to show some sign.' (stops singing) Yep, he can, he can, oh, he can tear that one up. Oooh, you ought to hear his lead. (laughs) Yeah, I ain't just bragging on him. But he's good.

Archie Flowers is part of a gospel group called the Melody Kings. One night, Archie invited me and our producer Natalie to come check out a practice in a meeting room at the public library in Greenwood, Mississippi.

(hallway sounds)

Madeleine Baran: Hi!

Man: How are you?

Madeleine Baran: Good, how are you?

Archie Flowers: They're working on my son's case, you know.

Sam: Oh, oh, oh, oh, OK.

Madeleine Baran: Yeah, we're public radio reporters.

Sam: Oh, OK.

Archie Flowers introduced us to his group. Most of the men were in their 60s, 70s, or 80s, with the exception of one of their soloists, who's in his twenties.

Madeleine Baran: So what kind of singer is Mr. Flowers?

David Ruffin: He's good. He's good. He's everybody's favorite. Archie! They want to see or hear Archie.

(laughter)

Madeleine Baran: Do people really call him out like that?

Archie Flowers: He pick at me all the time.

David Ruffin: Archie!

That night, the Melody Kings were there to practice for a big show to celebrate the group's anniversary. They were picking out which songs to sing, including one of their favorites. It's called "Who'll be a witness." Archie Flowers sings the lead on that one.

David Ruffin: You're going to hear him sing. We're gonna do a little a cappella for you. How about that?

Natalie Jablonski: That would be great.

David Ruffin: What's the name of that song again?

Archie Flowers: Who'll be a witness?

David Ruffin: Who'll be a witness. Ready?

THE GROUP SINGS "WHO'LL BE A WITNESS"

Man in the group: That's it, OK?

Madeleine Baran: That was fantastic.

Natalie Jablonski: Amazing

*Madeleine Baran: That was worth the trip
(chatter, laughing)*

While we were leaving, one of the group members, a man named Paul Salley, gave me a flyer for the group's anniversary show.

Paul Salley: Look here.

Madeleine Baran: OK.

Paul Salley: Y'all come to the anniversary, enjoy yourselves, stay as long as you want to. No charge at all.

Madeleine Baran: OK.

Paul: We're going to have plenty of food, that's Sunday.

Madeleine Baran: Nice, okay

Paul: You can come by and you're going to eat all you want to. No charge. Eat free.

Madeleine Baran: All right. Thank you so much! We will not miss it.

A week later, I went to the Melody Kings 56th anniversary performance at a community center in Greenwood.

It was one big room with long tables set up with chairs. Nearly a hundred people were there. And at the front of the room, was a makeshift stage with a banner on the wall behind it that said Melody Kings in white and maroon paint with white and maroon balloons on either side. This was exactly the kind of event that Curtis, if he wasn't in prison, would have been here for.

The night included a procession.

One by one, each member of the Melody Kings was introduced and walked toward the stage. They were all wearing matching maroon suits, pink ties, and white dress shirts.

Woman: The kings have weathered many storms.

Archie Flowers is actually one of the newest members. He's only been in the group for a decade or so.

Woman: Now we will have Mr. Archie Flowers, tenor, lead singer, treasurer, and his wife is here, Mrs. Lola Flowers.

The Melody Kings took the stage.

Singing: I couldn't hear nobody pray

Archie Flowers told me that even after all these years, sometimes when he's singing with his group, he forgets that his son Curtis isn't there and he turns around to look at him.

Archie Flowers: You know, sometime I'll be on a song and then, and just it, I turn my head. Sometimes I'll be looking for him to be standing there, you know, and just, that's the way. You get to feeling good on a song, you say, 'Well, he ought to—.' Your mind will say, 'Well, he ought to be back there, you know. He ought to be helping you sing.' Oooh, I miss Curtis. Mm. It is rough. Rough, rough, rough.

When Archie Flowers sings, sometimes it almost feels like Curtis is right there with him like how it was years ago.

They both love this song. In the one video I have of Curtis, recorded back in the 90s, Curtis is singing this same song.

(Audio from the video of Curtis singing in the 1990s)

Curtis sounds a lot like his father. Especially when you hear these two men, father and son, back to back on these two recordings, separated by 20-some years.

(Mix of Curtis and Archie Flowers singing)

(Music fades out)

One day last year, I went to see another member of Curtis' family, Curtis' daughter. Her name is Crystal, and she was just three years old when Curtis was arrested. She's now 24. And when I met her, she was eight months pregnant.

Madeleine Baran: Do you know if you're having a boy or a girl?

Crystal Ghoston: I'm having a girl. Ariel.

Madeleine Baran: Ariel.

Crystal Ghoston: Yes, ma'am. First baby.

Madeleine Baran: How do you feel?

Crystal Ghoston: Scared.

Crystal said she was hoping to be able to bring her baby to see Curtis in prison, so he could meet his granddaughter.

Crystal Ghoston: That's why I'm trying to go ahead and get on his visitation list, so when I have the baby I can take her to see him. Because I've got like three weeks left before I have—. (sigh) It's getting close.

Back in 2010, when Crystal was just 16, she testified in her father's sixth trial. The goal of her testimony was to try to convince the jurors to spare her father's life. She told the jurors, "He's a nice person." Curtis' lawyer asked her, "Do you love your father?" And Crystal said yes.

Crystal Ghoston: I was so scared. I was scared. I was so scared, like when I got off the stand. And my daddy, he wouldn't even look at me. I don't know why, but when I got off the stand, but he sent his lawyers back there to give me his watch and his handkerchief, and I just cried. And I've still got his watch right to today. I still have it.

Madeleine Baran: Yeah, what has this been like for you?

Crystal Ghoston: It's hard. I miss him. I just want to be around him. I want him to come home. That's about it. We write all the time.

Madeleine Baran: What do you write about?

Crystal Ghoston: Oh, things just about—he always tell me he coming home. I got faith that he coming home. I hope he come home. And he just tells me how much he miss me. He's happy, he's excited about being a grandpap.

Madeleine Baran: Do you like imagine what it would be like if he were to someday get out of prison?

Crystal Ghoston: Yes. I would be with him right about now. I can't wait. If he ever get out, we're gonna catch up on all the times we done missed, and all the times I done missed with him.

Madeleine Baran: Yeah. Do you think he'll get out?

Crystal Ghoston: Yes, ma'am. I have faith that he going to come home one day. And the day they open the gates, I want to be there.

One of the few people Curtis Flowers has been able to meet with in prison is a criminal investigator named Max Mayes. He's been working on Curtis' defense for about nine years. Curtis' parents told me there's no one on Curtis' defense team, past or present, they trust more than Max Mayes.

Max Mayes told me that he's been direct with Curtis about what might happen in his case.

Max Mayes: I said, 'Do you realize that they're trying to kill you?' He said, 'Yeah.' I said, 'At some point in time if the courts do not continue to overturn your case, you will probably be put to death.' He said, 'I know that.' He said, 'Let me explain something to you. If they put me to death, I'd be better off than the place I am in right now.' He said,

'And the person who will have to live with that is Doug Evans the district attorney. Doug knows that I didn't commit this crime, so he'll have to live the rest of his life knowing that a person has been put to death that shouldn't have been put to death.' And that's Curtis' attitude.

Madeleine Baran: And it sounds like it's, it's like him and Doug Evans—like they're locked in this thing.

Max Mayes: It's him against Doug Evans. It's not him versus the system or anything. It is basically Curtis Flowers versus Doug Evans. And in the end, who's going to win?

Next time on In the Dark—what was going on at the trials of Curtis Flowers?

(music plays)

Song lyrics: Take me to the courtroom...

In the Dark is reported and produced by me, Madeleine Baran. Senior producer Samara Freemark, producer Natalie Jablonski, associate producer Rehman Tungekar, and reporters Parker Yesko and Will Craft.

In the Dark is edited by Catherine Winter. Web editors are Dave Mann and Andy Kruse. The Editor in Chief of APM Reports is Chris Worthington. This episode was mixed by Corey Schreppel. Original music by Gary Meister and Johnny Vince Evans. Additional music for this episode courtesy of The Melody Kings, including this song you're hearing right now, which we recorded at the Melody Kings 56th anniversary show last fall.

You can see a video of Archie Flowers singing with the Melody Kings on our web site, inthedarkpodcast.org. You can also read about what life is like inside Parchman prison and learn more about what Odell Hallmon's recanting might mean for Curtis' case. Again, that's at inthedarkpodcast.org.